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A Living Lutheran Faith

O. H. Pannkoke, D. D.

"All those are foolish who seek a knowledge of things through causes, as Aristotle, because they are incomprehensible."—MARTIN LUTHER.

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Saving truth "cannot be included in the narrow forms of reason and dialectics because it is not against but outside, inside, above, below, this side, and beyond all dialectical truth."

"We must go therefore to another dialectic and philosophy in the articles of faith, which is called the word of God and faith. We do better therefore if we leave dialectics or philosophy in their spheres and learn to speak in new language in the realm of faith outside of every sphere.—The affection of faith needs to be exercised in the articles of faith not the understanding of philosophy."

"I am concerned lest philosophy may again be brought too much into theology. I am not opposed to teaching and learning philosophy. — But it is not right to bring it into theology just as though it belonged there. That cannot be tolerated."

—MARTIN LUTHER

A LIVING LUTHERAN FAITH defines Luther's dynamic evangelical view of the Word of God. It was written as a call to a living, active faith in this critical hour of world Lutheranism, and as a contribution to the cause of Lutheran unity.

The National Lutheran Council at its meeting in January was impressed with the evangelical insight, the prophetic vision, and the timeliness of this paper and decided to place a copy into the hands of every Lutheran pastor in the United States.

This pamphlet was written with a deep concern for the future of the Lutheran Church in a critical hour. It is our prayer that you may read it in that spirit and that in that spirit it may be discussed wherever Lutheran pastors may meet in these coming months.

P. O. BERSELL,
President, National Lutheran Council.

Minneapolis, Minn.,
February 12, 1944.

"I read it with absorbing interest. The author has shown evangelical insight, historic vision, spiritual emphasis, scholarship and maturity."

Rev. J. A. Aasgaard, D. D., President,
The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America,
Minneapolis, Minn.

"A mighty, prophetic appeal to make American Lutheranism a living *Lutheranism*."

Rev. T. O. Burntvedt, LL.D.,
President, Lutheran Free Church,
Minneapolis, Minn.

"I heartily favor its publication and wide circulation."

Rev. F. H. Knubel, D.D.,
President United Lutheran Church in America,
New York, New York.

"My colleagues in our Church offices agree with me as to its value and the desirability of its publication."

Rev. Em. Poppen, D.D., L.H.D.,
President American Lutheran Church,
Columbus, Ohio.

"It clearly sets forth the dynamic value of our Lutheran faith."

President B. M. Christiansen, Ph.D.,
President Augsburg College and Seminary,
Minneapolis, Minn.

"It is an outstanding contribution and deserves wide publication."

Rev. W. H. Greever, D.D., Secretary,
The United Lutheran Church in America,
New York, New York.

"Everything should be done to have it circulated among all the ministers of the Lutheran Church both within the National Lutheran Council and outside."

Rev. J. C. K. Preus, D.D.,
Educational Director and Executive Secretary,
Board of Education N. L. C. A.,
Minneapolis, Minn.

"It probes to the very heart of our Lutheran problem, with an entirely new approach, and seems to give the answer for which we have been searching."

Rev. H. Yochum, President,
American Lutheran Conference,
Detroit, Mich.

INTRODUCTION

Like a knight in armor, the late Dr. Lars W. Boe, of St. Olaf College, crusaded through the years for improved understanding and increased cooperation among Lutherans in America.

Few of us who heard him will ever forget the thrill of his plea:

"I would have you join with me in a great objective, to bind the Lutheran church together in the bonds of truth for united testimony in word and deed, in order that we may take our rightful place in the ranks of the Christian church of our land and play our full part. To this, in the deepest recesses of my heart, I have dedicated myself and I would dedicate you. For this I would become a Crusader."

In something of the same spirit, large numbers of men, widely distributed among the general Lutheran bodies, have increasingly given themselves to this high endeavor.

The author of this booklet, who was a close friend of Dr. Boe until his untimely death, has a long record of service in the cause of Lutheran cooperation. In 1915-1917, he was the organizer and secretary of the Joint Reformation Quadricentenary Committee, thus beginning that cooperative movement which later found expression in the National Lutheran Council. Throughout the succeeding years, Dr. Pannkoke has steadfastly stood for an inclusive unity at the *evangelical center of our faith*. In many important enterprises, through pamphlets and articles, through his innumerable contacts with Lutheran leaders, he has sought to promote the ideal which is so cogently set forth in the present pamphlet.

In the field of Lutheran practical co-operation, the next few months will bring decisions as to questions of vital sig-

nificance. At the moment, there is before eight of the Lutheran general bodies of America, a plan for a greater unity of endeavor in an expanded National Lutheran Council. The more full and effective use of this agency in the doing of joint work may well be the means for bringing all Lutherans closer together. What is determined upon in this connection may have far-reaching significance for our church and for the Kingdom of God.

Out of the war situation, there has descended upon us a responsibility such as only once in centuries falls to a group of God's servants. Leadership of world Lutheranism has passed to America. No man can as yet understand fully the vast implications of this fact. But this we may surely know—that failure to meet this challenge would be fraught with incalculable loss and tragedy.

Great crises demand great faith. They demand great courage. They demand return to great fundamentals.

This booklet is a call to such faith, such courage, such return to fundamentals. It has been read and approved, its wide reading and discussion urged, by our greatest American Lutheran leaders. A few of their statements, expressed in letters to the writer, appear on a preceding page.

Wittenberg College is glad to aid in a modest measure in arranging for the distribution of this message. May God grant that its call may reach the hearts and stir the wills of our Lutheran people, pastors and laymen, throughout America.

Rees Edgar Tulloss.

President's Office,
Wittenberg College,
Ash Wednesday, 1944.

A LIVING LUTHERAN FAITH

"A theology which scrutinizes the kernel of the nut, the heart of the grain of wheat, the marrow of the bones", was Luther's ideal. It means a theology which hears and heeds the direct and immediate call of God, without hiding it in the chaff of rational reflection or enclosing it in the hard shell of passing patterns of the human mind.

Unquestionably, this desire of Luther to grasp and to preach the Gospel itself as God's urgent call to man was the secret of his reforming power, and kindled for a period a moral and a spiritual fire in Europe unequalled except in the early church.

A theology like Luther's is the supreme need of our church today. A new fullness of time confronts the Lutherans of America. A new era looms, with graver responsibilities than have so far come to new-world Lutherans.

*A World Task
Awaits Us*

In part — and most immediately — the preservation of world Lutheranism will rest on the Lutherans of America. European Lutheranism is at low ebb and in a critical condition. The destruction of church property by the end of the war will be unparalleled. With the impoverishment of central Europe, there are no prospects of rebuilding more than a fraction of what has been destroyed. The organization of the Church will be disrupted by the new political map of Europe and by the new groups contending for power. A new wave of nihilism may break out and declare war on everything connected with the Church. The marks of death and decay will hang over European church life for years to come. To stem this tide will, to the largest extent, be the task of the Lutherans of America. It is a great and a critical task, greater than is faced by any other Protestant group.

The complexity and the magnitude of its detailed parts are staggering. Among disheartened and disintegrating Lutheran groups, scattered all over Europe, to organize and to protect minorities, to assure an adequate supply of pastors, to help rebuild churches, to help re-establish normal church life, to reopen the avenues of scholarship. The success of these detailed tasks will depend upon our statesmanship in organizing the Lutherans of the world quickly and efficiently, and in formulating a broad program which can mobilize all the resources without delay and concentrate them where they are needed.

*We Face Revolutionary
Changes*

Under normal circumstances, this is an obligation to test the quality of American Lutherans. It is made more difficult because underlying the present and the last war is a world social and cultural revolution. World society has lost its equilibrium and will be in upheaval until it develops new methods of control. Socially four forces have broken loose and made the 19th century liberal state obsolete. The first is technological efficiency which brought about the second industrial revolution after the last war and is bringing about the third now. The second is super-capitalism. The third is the industrialization of the backward, agricultural, market areas of the world. The fourth is the rise of the masses. These forces have upset the balance of power and broken down the old controls in every nation and in the world. There will be terrific upheavals until a new balance and new controls have been established.

Culturally the era of individualism, which began in the Renaissance and which found its religion in the conquests of science and faith in progress, is coming to a close. Again humanity is standing baffled, demanding an answer, before the deepest questions of life: What can we know, what can we hope, what can we do? While the Lutheran forces of America are fulfilling their world obligation in the face of

destruction and chaos, they must at the same time chart their course through a world revolution.

*God Has Led Us
To This Moment*

In many ways, it seems as though God has been leading the Lutherans of America toward this movement. They have traveled far since the shock of the first world war roused them to unexpected life and began to bring them together. The question of unity, which was so difficult because of the many language barriers and because of an extreme dogmatic pre-occupation, has nearly been solved. Numerous avenues of consultation and cooperation have developed. Through them a network of understanding, friendship, good will has been spun embracing the whole church. As a result, waste and duplication have been reduced, and the program of the church in every aspect has been made more efficient. Contrary to the *Ethos* of the Lutheran Church in the past, the Church in America has become an intensely active and life-centered church which has demonstrated on many occasions and in a large way, its organizing ability. In 1918 our church was a divided church, isolated in many foreign language culture islands, emphasizing faith only too often at the expense of vigorous action in life. In the light of later developments, it was a giant asleep, unaware of his powers. Our Church has awakened and it is ready for God's great call today.

In spite of the grave difficulties, there are encouraging features in the outlook. The first is the prospect of prosperity for some years after the war, far greater even than the prosperity after the first war. Large war-time savings, the pressure of severely curbed peacetime buying, reconstruction of devastated areas, new markets, formerly supplied by enemy nations, promise boom times for American business and very great prosperity to the American people. The resources will be available to the Lutherans of America for carrying on reconstruction in Europe in a really large way,

far larger than after the first war. Furthermore, the world has shrunk. Communications have speeded up. A world program can be developed and executed far more rapidly than before. *If we are approaching "one world" politically and economically, we need to think seriously of one world in Christ.*

*This Is God's Hour
of Decision*

It is a unique moment in Lutheran history. It has all the urgency of history's great and decisive moments because it is God's moment. God is calling for a decision.

The call of God is not an abstraction which can be argued out in the study. It is the call of life, behind which God is directing the course of history and in whose circumstances God sets our task. God calls us to face that task not by argument but by decision, not by words but by deeds.

Time is irreversible. Luther says: "Of all time, we have only the present moment." The present moment is the moment of decision. In the present moment too is God's offered opportunity. "God's Word is a passing shower which does not return. Therefore reach out and hold on whoever can reach out and hold on." (Luther)

Such is the fateful meaning of the present hour, because the future of the Reformation Church depends on it to such a large degree. God is placing us before a moral decision heavier than we have ever faced. The stakes are world stakes.

It is possible to put the fateful moral responsibility of this hour of decision on a deeper level still. Luther says: "The world and its God neither can nor will hear the Word of God, and God cannot be silent. With these two Gods fighting each other, what else can there be but tumult in the whole world."

Such is the Christian meaning of history and life, the titanic struggle between God and evil. In moments like the present it attains the fury of the hurricane. But behind all the outward fury, behind all human purposes, is the

controlling purpose of God, the triumph of the Word of Salvation.

The ultimate question which the Living Word directs to our conscience in this fateful hour is: "On whose side are you fighting, on My side or on the side of the forces of evil?"

*Three Serious
Difficulties
Confront Us*

There are three serious difficulties in the way. The first is a culture optimism which precludes both a full grasp of the seriousness of this moment and a full insight into the uniqueness and the resources of the Christian faith. It has confidence in human culture to improve man's lot. It fails to see the fatal seriousness of sin and has, therefore, no sense of the centrality of the Cross in history and in life. The Christian religion becomes a reform movement, the church a club. The line of demarcation between the Church and the world tends to disappear. Piety is less a deep and humble consecration to God than a comfortable feeling of being virtuous. Preaching seeks to make the Christian message respectable to the world and in doing so it sacrifices its power to transform the world.

A second difficulty is the intellectual approach to our faith, current in the larger part of our church. It conceives our faith to be a system of thought and not a power in life. Not only does it spend its time primarily on theological system building; but by intellectualizing the Christian faith it diverts the interest of the Church away from life, and it puts grave difficulties in the way of understanding the dynamic nature of our faith and expressing it in an hour demanding action.

A third difficulty results from these two. It is the division of our Church into hostile camps. This division has been a tragedy in the past. It will become the great tragedy of our church if it cannot be resolved in time so that the Lutheran forces of America may cooperate in preserving world Lutheranism after the war.

*Our Great
Need*

It is believed by some that if we can agree on definitions, unity and cooperation are assured. That is a very superficial belief. The point of divergence lies deeper than intellectual disagreement. It lies in the contrast and the conflict between intellectual and dynamic. In other words, before definitions of our faith can even be attempted, the question needs to be settled whether God's revelation of Himself through Christ is a dynamic act, confronting humanity with the great decision, or whether it is an addition to the store of human knowledge. Until this deeper question as to the nature of the Gospel itself has been settled, argument is futile because there is neither clarity nor agreement as to the first principle from which the argument must proceed.

We need a theology like Luther's which "scrutinizes the kernel of the nut, the heart of the grain of wheat, and the marrow of the bones." This is only another way of saying that in this fateful hour we need to rediscover the dynamic evangelical center of our faith which for a period in Reformation days burned so brightly and accomplished so much.

Throughout Christian history, the Greek spirit has been in conflict with the Christian revelation. Through Aristotle's dialectics it has sought to make a system of abstract truths out of God's great call to salvation. Instead of approaching God's Word directly as Luther did, it tried to understand and define is through Aristotelean forms of logic and definition. Luther well saw that Aristotle and Christ, Athens and Jerusalem, Greek intellect and Christian revelation are irreconcilable enemies. God does not speak to man in the abstract logic of Aristotle or in the pure ideas of Plato. God speaks in the living language of His passionate love for sinners and His irresistible will to save.

We need to recover this living quality in God's revelation, in our view of the Word, of conscience, of faith, of history, and especially in our theological method. That means, we need to recover Luther's living faith.

I.

We need to recover:

A Living Idea of God

A living idea of the Word of God is fundamental in this quest to recover the dynamic evangelical center of our faith. The great discovery in recent decades, breaking the impasse of western thought, has been the uniqueness of the *I-thou* relationship. When we meet another *I*, we meet not an object for reflection and analysis, we meet a personality with his own view of life and his own aspirations and will. This relationship to other *I*'s is distinct from the relationship to the objective world and it is unique. The relationship to other souls is by far the closest analogy of the relationship of the soul to God. God is not an object. He is a *Thou* for me, and I am the *Thou* for His everlasting, "I am the Lord thy God." God's Word then is His personal call to man. He confronts men with His Word. He offers them His grace and He asks them to recognize Him as the Lord. That is what Luther saw so clearly when he insisted incessantly, *Evangelium est promissio*. The Gospel is a promise, a personal promise of God to man. For that reason Luther said, "the best sermon is the one in which you hear your God speaking to you." Conversely, God can never be an object to be spoken about. He is the everlasting *I* which always must be spoken to.

We Must Escape From Abstractions

It is the influence of the Greek tradition which seeks to make God's Word a system of thought rather than God's personal call. The Greek intellectual tradition entered our Church through Melancthon. It flowered in the period of classical dogmatics. It is a powerful influence in the Lutheran Church of America today. Our Church's chief task is to escape this tradition and to return to Luther and the Bible.

As a system of thought the Word of God becomes impersonal, abstract, remote from life, an object of discussion which never ends. It engages the intellect. It neglects the affections and the will. It dwells in ivory towers of pure thought, indifferent to the needs and the experiences and the great decisions of life. The Gospel itself becomes the lifeless letter which killeth just as much as the letter of the law.

The *I-thou* relationship is a life relationship in which our will meets another will to work out the great issues of life. In the same way in His Word, the will of God meets our will in God's everlasting Now to compel the *greatest* decision in life. That event is only in a minor way an intellectual event, and it is in no way an abstract and impersonal truth. It is a personal event reaching down into the very roots of our being, and it is a life's truth on which are staked life's deepest outcomes.

II.

We need to recover:

A Living View of Conscience

A living view of conscience is a second requisite for the recovery of the dynamic nature of our faith.

The intellectual view of conscience is derived from the Stoics. They believed in a world mind of which the individual souls are part. In each soul are implanted innate ideas of good and of evil which may be fully discovered by reason. This view became part of the Christian tradition, together with the related Stoic concept of natural law.

When the Church took over this Stoic concept, God became the world mind and the supreme law giver. God's law was written in the human mind in the same way as the innate ideas of the Stoic philosophers. The argument from cause to effect seemed a logical proof that God exists and

that He has the right to make laws. The belief in innate ideas carried with it the idea that man knows those laws and is culpable if he fails to obey them. The relationship between God, God's law and man becomes purely intellectual, external, and mechanical.

Throughout most of the Christian centuries there seemed to be no flaw in this procedure. Neither the existence of God was questioned nor the ability of reason to know His law. The elaborate argumentation to prove that God is rested in fact on the assumption of His existence, and was the exercise of a faith preceding and controlling the argument. All this was changed in modern days. Locke in his "Essay on the Human Understanding" disproved the existence of innate ideas. Kant and Hume laid the foundations for the empiricism of modern times which simply will not recognize the validity of intellectual proofs for the existence and the final authority of God. An intellectual view of conscience is meaningless to modern man.

*Conscience Is Rooted
In The Whole
Personality*

If God does not reach man through the intellect, is there a point then where He does reach man? If the intellectual view of conscience is proven fallacious, does conscience remain? God reaches man at a point far deeper than the intellect—in his innermost personality. Conscience is, in fact, not an impersonal idea about external rules. It is the supreme fact of man's life. Freedom, choice, responsibility are the deepest characteristics of human life. Man lives always for tomorrow. It is *his* decision to make tomorrow what he desires and it is *his* responsibility to bear the consequences.

Conscience is the recognition of the inescapable necessity to *know* what is the *right* course in the critical, fateful moments of life,—the deep desire to find in the structure of the universe itself a God who understands the longings of the human soul and is friendly toward them.

When God then confronts the conscience of man, He speaks to the whole personality, seeking life's fulfillment. It becomes life's existential moment, the great hour of decision. It is not an intellectual, it is a moral and a spiritual event.

III.

We need to recover:

A Living View of Faith

A living view of faith is a third requisite. Theologically, faith has been thoroughly analyzed to guard against even the remotest suspicion of synergism and to bring out God's grace in all its fullness. Psychologically, faith is less well understood. Abstract analysis has tended to obscure and to confuse the operation of faith rather than to reveal it as a power in life.

Faith has been said to consist of knowledge, assent, and trust. That is unquestionably true. However, the living faith of the great man of God is more than the sum of these three concepts. It is the organic moving force of a personality in life. The organic nature of faith, which is its power, tends to disappear under analysis.

Furthermore, in this analytical approach it is possible to place the emphasis either on knowledge, on assent, or on trust. As the emphasis changes, the quality of faith itself changes. If knowledge and assent are considered more important, faith becomes intellectual and literal. If trust is important, faith becomes emotional. As a matter of fact, the history of the Lutheran Church in America may be written entirely in the light of the shift of emphasis from knowledge to trust. The accent on one or another of these concepts seems to give a church body its distinctive character.

*"Faith Is a Living
Doing, Mighty,
Active Thing."*

However, in an organic view of faith as the moving force of a personality in life, faith is more than knowledge of God, more than assent to Christian truths, more than trust in God's grace. It is an act of commitment to God, as a soldier gives allegiance to his commander. It is a new attitude, a new alignment, a new purpose in life. Man hears God's call. He breaks with the past. He follows God. That is the dynamic element in faith. To be dynamic, faith must change the will and turn it into new directions. The knowledge of the mind, the warmth of the affections fall short of the mark until the will is changed and sets out to follow God. At that point alone faith becomes dynamic and transforms the world.

The difficulty of attaining a living view of faith has not only resulted from the failure to see that faith is organic, an expression of the whole personality and of a changed will. The intellectual content of faith has been considered not as the personal call of God but as an impersonal and often metaphysical system of truth. When that is done, Christian truth appeals only to the critical judgment of the mind. It leaves the moral and the spiritual aspirations of the soul cold. Instead of being a truth which may give significance to life, it becomes theory of the same kind as other human learning. Luther says, "faith is not a geometrical science." For Luther faith was a fulfillment of life's deepest need. The intellectual content of faith is never abstract. Still less is it metaphysical truth. It is always truth which is of immediate value for life.

IV.

We need to recover:

A Living Christian View of History

A living Christian view of history is a fourth requisite. The Greeks had no sense of history. They were interested in abstract, perfect, and unchanging truth, and not in the ceaseless change of history. The direct participation of God in history through His plan of Salvation, the birth of Christ in the fullness of time, the urgency of the hope of Christ's return as the fulfillment of history, the belief that history is the battlefield between God and Satan, have made history important for the Christian faith. The question as to the Christian meaning of history is urgent again today.

In our church Luther represents the intensely dynamic and concrete Christian view of history. Parallel with Luther's view the Greek tradition has had and still has a powerful influence in our Church. Instead of seeking to understand how God operates in the concrete historic situation and in the changing circumstances of life, the Greek tradition is concerned to build systems of Christian truth by pure thought with little or no concern for history and life — systems which are then declared to be divine truth. God's Word becomes a philosophy of heaven and ceases to be a power to save men in the harsh struggle of life. Especially in a day like the present, in which as W. Lippman says, whirl is king, for the Church to follow the Greek instead of the Christian and Lutheran tradition means to retire from life.

*History Is God's
Battlefield
Against Sin*

For Luther, God's activity is the final ground of history and its highest law. The moving force in history is not the struggle for existence. It is not the unfolding idea of Hegel. It is not the blind movement of the atoms. God makes history. Luther paraphrases Paul's

statement, "God who worketh all in all," in the words, "God works life, death, and all in all—God's will is the rule of everything."

This God of Luther—and it is the God of Paul—is not a God of pure thought like the Absolute One of Plotinus, contemplating himself through the eternities. He is intensely active in life. Luther calls Him, "actuosissimus." — "For God does not rest. He works without ceasing." God's chief characteristic is the will to save. Man's chief concern is not to know what God is but what He does.

The central fact of history is conflict — the conflict between God and the forces of evil. War, battle, combat are the striking pictures under which Luther views history. "The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan are always at war" — "The bitterest enemies." — "There is no neutral Kingdom."

God does not reveal, He hides Himself in history. He is and ever remains the *Deus Absconditus* — beyond the reach of reason—found only by faith. In secular history, Hannibal and Alexander are only the outward "masks" of God's rule. God has all "the strings of the game" in His own hands. But God works through His creatures and through His orders of creation. "The creatures are the hands and the means through which God gives everything." With drastic emphasis Luther says, "God does not wish His creatures to rest." They are not spectators, they are responsible participants in life's conflict.

*The Divine
Paradox*

In the life and death of Christ, God reveals the central purpose of history and His characteristic way of dealing with men. It is completely contrary to the ways of human reason. It is the great paradox whose inner meaning is seen only by faith. The ruler of the universe becomes the humblest of men and dies a shameful death on the Cross. "What God does is all against reason and sense." — "Grace outwardly appears like wrath. It is hidden so deeply."

The Christian view of history reaches its climax in the great paradox of life. In God's sight, all human values disappear. The glory of the world turns to dust and ashes. The high aspirations of natural man become vain in the lowliness, the shame, the vicarious sufferings of God on the Cross. Natural man's history ends at the Cross. On the other hand, at the Cross, for the man of faith, begins the gravest responsibility to play a part in history. It is hardly conceivable that a stronger motive could be found for historical action than the motive of the Cross.

*The Gospel the
Dynamic of
History*

The Cross is the center of history. It mediates the only true knowledge of God and history's inner meaning. The preaching of the Word of the Cross until the coming of Christ is history's central purpose. The Gospel is the power through which God works in history. It is the only true dynamic of history.

The Gospel comes in the concrete circumstances of the historic NOW. Luther understood the urgency of the historic moment and expressed it with matchless power. "Of all eternity we have only the present moment." He speaks of "the blessed time" — "the truly golden year." — "The morning star of the Gospel shines after the long night." — "God's Word and Grace are a passing shower, which does not return."

This is a dynamic view of history, full of tension, struggle, and action. It is a realistic view of history, unafraid to recognize the harshness of life and to accept the great paradoxes of faith which at all times are foolishness and a scandal to the mind of man. It is a view of history *sub specie crucis* and of faith. This view of history permits of no pietistic flight from life, of no mystical retreat from reality, nor of any contemplative contentment in a realm of pure ideas. It has no room for spectators. It demands participants. Its watchword is "let us watch therefore, fight, pray, with all our power."

We need to recover:

A Living Theological Method

Realistic A living theological method is a final requisite. Such a method is *realistic*. It stays close to the concrete facts of God's way of saving men as well as to the concrete facts of life. It avoids formal categories developed by schools of theology and finds its categories in God's Word itself. It refrains from reflections lying beyond its material and from seeking to develop a coherent rational system. Luther's theology was realistic. The Middle Ages had developed two great theological methods, the scholastic and the mystical. The one sought to understand God by reason, the other sought direct communion with God by mystical contemplation. Luther freed himself from these methods and wrestled all his life to penetrate to the very heart of the Word as it works in life and to express it in simple, living language. He calls the scholastics "theologians of glory" because they seek through reason and not through Christ to know God, and he says, "they call evil good and good evil but a theologian of the Cross calls it *what the thing itself is*." He faces reality. In his commentary to Romans, he says, "our opinion is right and true, when it estimates *things as they are*."

Practical A living theological method is *practical*. Its controlling insight and viewpoint is that God has revealed Himself in Christ *to save souls*. It deals with saving truth and not with theoretical, metaphysical or scientific systems. Metaphysical or scientific truth is impersonal. It deals with the objective world and seeks to explain it. Saving truth is always personal. It seeks to answer man's final questions: What is the meaning and purpose of life, what course do I choose to reach life's fulfillment? It does not explain the objective world. It satisfies the moral aspi-

rations and the spiritual longings at the root of human personality. It satisfies them by pointing to God's gift: Christ. Nowhere has Luther expressed this as powerfully as in the statement, "True theology is practical — speculative theology belongs with the devil in hell." Luther's theology "despised and renounced" everything "which is not necessary to the soul's salvation."

Empirical A living theological method is *empirical*. It is founded on a deep personal faith and piety and it gains its deepest insights in the tribulations and temptations of an active Christian life. It is life and soul-centered. "My theology," Luther says, "I did not learn at once. I had to seek deeper and deeper. My tribulations forced me to do this. Scripture can never be understood without practice and tribulation."—"I have learned this not only through Scripture but through much, great, and varied experience." Luther's theology, Theodosius Harnack says, "was born out of the most vital relation of the life in God and the knowledge about God."

Dynamic A living theological method is *dynamic*. Its emphasis is on the affections and the will and not primarily on the intellect. The picture of God in Luther is intensely personal, active, dynamic. In the later dogmaticians much of this dynamic quality is lost. God becomes "eternal mind", "a spiritual being," a something to be defined instead of the Person to be heard. In the same way Luther conceives faith as dynamic activity in life. "So faith is a living, doing, mighty, active thing, seeking to do good before even it is asked." This dynamic militant quality of faith has largely disappeared in our Church. Its recovery is our deepest need.

Organic The best way to characterize Luther's theological method is to say that it is *organic*. The whole personality is concerned in it, mind, heart and will,

as it struggles to fulfill its destiny in life. Luther tries to see the great Christian truths as they really are and as they actually operate in life. The intellectual approach is primarily concerned with logical coherence and not with saving souls. It tends to neglect the affections and especially the will. It divides the unity of a living truth into its component parts and often pays little attention to the fact that truth works as a whole and that its dynamic nature is lost in the division into its parts. It defines a static cross-section of life and misses completely the ceaseless movement which is the deepest characteristic of life. It makes God's revelation a motionless system of truth instead of a power which restlessly works in life.

This form of intellectual approach was foreign to Luther. His theological method was the function of a living faith constrained by conscience to preach the Word for the saving of souls. It saw faith in its working unity, organically. It lived in the market place and understood men and their need for salvation. It thought and spoke in the concrete language of life and of the life-directed Word of God. Because Luther's approach is so completely realistic, organic, and rooted in the experience of saving grace and in the desire to save souls, every part of his theology is alive. It is concrete. It meets the spiritual hopes of the soul and answers the needs of life. It expresses to the utmost the supremacy of the will and the predominance of conflict in life. It minimizes ideologies which believe they have a rational answer for every situation in life, and places the Christian before the uniqueness of the historical moment—his high duty to decide—to act—and not merely to reflect.

*A Theology
of Faith*

Luther's theology is in the deepest sense of the word a theology of faith in the Living Word. It has freed itself from the rationalism of Plato and Aristotle. It lives completely in the concrete circumstances of the surging stream of life and in the concrete realities of the Word itself. It is a theology which

has penetrated to "the marrow of the bones" and is as organic as life itself and the Living Word of God. *Such a theology is the supreme need of our church in this fateful historic hour. Such a theology will give us unity and strength, and will insure a new and great future for the Lutheran forces of the world.*

An historic moment for the Lutherans of America is here. Opportunities lie before us for service and achievement which the imagination can only dimly see because they are so great and they reach so far into the future. God has been schooling and preparing us for many years for this moment. We are ready for a supreme test. The only requirements still to fulfill before we march is the commitment, "Lord, lead on, we follow," and the full rediscovery of the Living Reformation faith.

Again Luther's word is true, "He stands at the door, it is well that we open it. He greets us, blessed is he who answers. If we miss it, that He passes by, who will recall Him?"

Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from the publication house of your church at cost of ten cents.